1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

to the *dampa*. The women participating in *nyuma* move about amidst the clumps of *padi* selecting the most mature panicles they can find, but at such an early stage none of the heads is fully ripe. While the grains at the tip of the panicle have hardened, those at the base are still slightly soft, so that if they are squeezed a milky fluid (termed *ai tusu* by the Iban) is expressed. Because of this the *padi* cannot be threshed in the normal way by treading; instead the grain is scraped (*ngerih*) from the panicles by hand with a bamboo 'knife'. This done, the grain is placed in a cooking pot, and boiled until the swollen kernels split open the still green husks. Next the grain is laid out on mats in the heat of the mid-day sun, and when dry, pounded in the usual way with a pestle and mortar. This whole process, from scraping to pounding, takes about four or five hours, and the rice (*brau*) is then ready for its final cooking. To quote a typical case, the reaping and *mata padi* rites took place at 0800 hours, the grain was prepared between 1100 hours and 1530 hours, and the first eating began at 1900 hours.

138. The first eating of the new rice, on the evening of the day upon which it is reaped, is a ritual occasion. Each *bilek* family possesses as part of its hereditary property, a special plate (*pinggai asi*) which is used only during certain rituals. For example, the first meal of a spouse on entry to a new *bilek* family is taken from this plate; it is also used in the first eating of the new season's rice. When all the members of the *bilek* family have assembled, the *pinggai asi*, piled up with rice, is carried to the centre of the room, and placed on top of a *nendak* omen-stick obtained the same morning. A prayer, in consecration, is uttered, and then a small portion of the rice rubbed on the hearth stones, to 'feed' them, and make propitious the cooking arrangements during the ensuing year. Next a share is put out for the dogs—a safeguard this, for it is believed that any deleterious influences which may have become associated with the *padi*, because of bad omens and the like encountered during the period of its cultivation, will thus be visited upon the dogs. Only when the dogs have eaten do the members of the family help themselves (in order of seniority) from the *pinggai asi*, and begin their meal. On the various occasions when I attended these *makai padi baru* rituals, I was always asked to eat first, so that the wealth and other qualities associated with Europeans by the Iban, might in some part come into the possession of the *bilek* family concerned—and a prayer, aimed at bringing this about was always said. The first eating is a jubilant and light-hearted event, and quite often, young men return from tapping rubber, hunting, or some other work especially to participate. The fresh, young rice does have a most delicious tang about it, and is eaten with much smacking of the lips, and such appreciative asides as: "*Manis amat!*" ("Truly sweet!"), and "*Nyamai amat d'empa!*" ("Pleasant indeed to eat!").

139. At Rumah Nyala in 1950, *nyuma* began on 10th February (about 143 days after sowing), and most of the other *bilek* families held their rituals during the following week. All but one of the 25 *bilek* families of the community performed *nyuma*. If a family still has stocks of *padi* from the previous year, *nyuma* is only done once or twice, but those families which have exhausted their supplies tend to continue with this premature reaping rather than purchase *padi* from others. At Rumah Nyala, one or two improvident *bilek* families reaped immature *padi* in large quantities. This is an unsound practice economically, for when *padi* is reaped before it is properly mature a percentage of grain from each panicle is, in fact, lost. The custom of *nyuma* thus helps to initiate (or to perpetuate) a vicious cycle, for excessive 'premature reaping' accelerates the exhaustion of a

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

average for the 25 *bilek* families of Rumah Nyala was only just short of 15 bushels per acre. In normal years an increase on this figure of at least two or three bushels would be likely, and in exceptionally good seasons it is probable that a general average of 20 (and more) bushels per acre is not infrequently attained.

Consumption of Padi by the Bilek Family

229. Having surveyed some of the main features of *padi* production among the Iban, we now come to the complementary problem of consumption. What are the normal annual requirements, in terms of *padi*, of the average *bilek* family? Obtaining an accurate answer to this question is not easy, and much depends on the methods employed. It is clearly important, for example, that a sound estimate be based on detailed first-hand observations, and not on the casual opinions of informants on how much they think they eat. Again, as a point in procedure, it is essential to realize that in consumption, as in production, it is the *bilek* family which must be the starting point of our enquiry. In other words, the standard of living of individuals is directly related to that of their *bilek* families. When food is prepared, plates of rice—and of a relish (*engkayu*) of some kind, are placed on a mat in the centre of the *bilek*; around about sit the various members of the family each with his or her own plate. Each person is then served from the common pool, and as necessary the central plates are replenished from cooking pots at the fireside. This way of taking meals means that it is not normally possible for an investigator to obtain measurements of the amount eaten by each individual, for to attempt to do so would be an unwarrantable interference. Instead we adopted the method of selecting five different *bilek* families for special study. For each family the amount of rice (*brau*) cooked at each meal was carefully measured in advance, a count made of the number of diners at each meal, and then—at the end of the day—an estimate was taken of the quantity of rice left in the cooking pot. In this way it was possible to calculate the quantity of rice consumed by each *bilek* family—men, women and children—in one day. From this, an average figure was obtained for the amount consumed per day per individual member. It should be noted that this last figure is a general individual average, and ignores differences in age and sex. However, for the five *bilek* families studied, the proportion of adults (62%) to children (38%), closely paralleled the proportion of adults (63·5%) to children (36·5%) in Iban society at large, and in this respect our sample is a typical one. (The general percentages for adults and children are based on my census of the three long-houses: Rumah Nyala, Rumah Tungku and Rumah Sibat, a child being defined as any individual 14 years of age or under).

230. Investigation by this method gave an average consumption per person per day of just over *one pint of brau*. (*Brau* is rice which has been pounded to remove the hull, and winnowed ready for cooking). This equals an annual consumption per person of approximately 47 gantangs of hulled rice, or 88·4 gantangs of *padi*. (It is assumed that two gantangs of *padi*, when pounded, produce one and one-sixteenth gantangs of *brau*; this proportion was accepted following a series of test poundings of small quantities of Iban *padi*).

231. It is clear that to obtain fully reliable figures for *padi* consumption extensive data would have to be assembled so that standard statistical checks could be applied. For our present purposes however, the general averages quoted above (though admittedly based on a small sample) would seem to be reasonably

3: Low G-5 (1844-1847) 1848
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of luxury. The Dyaks eat their food from the ground for a table; each having taken a portion of rice which he considers sufficient for him, this, if he be not provided with a plate, which many of them are, is placed upon a clean leaf of the Dillenia speciosa, and he dips his hand into the common stock of salt which is placed in the centre of the group. If they have flesh to their repast it is partaken of in a similar manner to the salt. They never drink during their meal, but on rising wash their hands and mouths, and afterwards take a draught of water from the bamboos, which are always kept full near the fire-place. Though they eat from the ground or floor of their houses, they rarely sit cross-legged upon it like the Malays, but have each a small block of wood about three inches in thickness, which they use as a seat by day and a pillow by night.

Around the walls of the apartment hang the gongs and other musical instruments, and such portions of their dress as they do not happen to be using, together with their spears, shields, and instruments of war. One side of the house always contains a rack, in which are placed the naked swords of the family, the sheaths hanging by their side. The doors of their houses are protected on the inside by a bar, but as pilfering is rare amongst these people, it is perhaps more to prevent intrusion when they wish for privacy, than as a protection against robbers. This is rendered evident by the doors, which cannot be fas-

3: Low G-5 (1844-1847) 1848
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the flesh of animals, as amongst the inland tribes. Nearly all the beasts of the forest are eaten by these people, even monkeys, alligators (if small), snakes and other reptiles are esteemed. Like the French, they regard frogs as a delicate dish, and bestow considerable pains in procuring them: their rice is cooked in brass or earthen pots, called priuks, which they purchase from the Malays; and plates of English manufacture have recently become very general among them. They eat from the plates with their right hand, compressing the rice (which is not cooked dry as that of the Malays) into a ball of convenient size. They know no way of cooking flesh but by boiling it, which they do in bamboos, having previously cut the whole animal into small pieces.

I once saw some Dyaks roasting a monkey, but did not stay to observe whether they did not boil it afterwards, as they generally partially roast these animals to free them from the hair. They have very little idea of flavouring their food except with salt, though they sometimes employ chilis, or small capsicums, turmeric, and ginger for that purpose. The Sebooyohs, who have lived more intimately with the Malays than the other tribes, have very much improved upon their cooking, the methods having been copied from their Mahometan neighbours. As they have no occasion for fire except for the purposes of cooking, their houses have no chimney, and the little smoke which is created finds its way through

4: Roth E-4 (no date) 1891 OC6 Iban OC6

few minutes in the sun before putting on their *chawats* (loin-cloths).

Their next duty is to prepare the morning meal. They eat with the men or not as they please, but they generally prefer to feed with the children after the men have finished. When breakfast is all over they clean up the crockery and brush the floor. The pigs and poultry are fed with the refuse, as are also the dogs.

They are now ready to accompany the men to the farm, or if not required they pursue their own occupations, which are various and manifold. As it is necessary to provide vegetables for the next meal, they visit their gardens for this purpose and bring home with them whatever they may be able to find in them, viz.:—cucumbers, pumpkins, melons, capsicums, &c. Tapioca leaves, cucumber leaves, and sweet-potato leaves are used by them as much as anything else, and they are fond of them when boiled in water.

Sometimes they go out fishing with scoop nets when they have the time to spare, or are desirous of a change of diet. It is the business of the men to provide pork, venison, and fresh fish, but the preserving is done by the women, who smoke or pickle according to fancy. There is never a want of firewood in a Dyak house; one of the first duties of a husband is to provide this, or he gets into bad odour with his wife or mother-in-law. The wood is smoked until every particle of moisture is evaporated out, and it becomes quite brittle and hard. If the women go out in the forenoon upon expeditions of the above kind, they have to be back again by the middle of the day to cook the mid-day meal. If they are busy on the farm, and mean to make a day of it with the family, they take what rice they require with them early in the morning and cook it on the spot to avoid the journey to and fro.

At two o'clock in the afternoon they pound a measure of paddy with heavy wooden pestles to free it from the husk; each woman is provided with a wooden mortar which is placed either in the *tempuan* or thoroughfare, or inside the *bilich* or room, and two women pound away at each. At 4 p.m. they bathe, and at 5 p.m. they are busy cooking for the third and last meal of the day. After the things are cleared away they hang up the mosquito curtains, and put the children to bed, while they sit up for an hour or two to converse with the men, and retire to rest when tired.

In addition to the above routine of daily labour, they have a variety of things to do, and are never idle. They have to fetch drinking water and to nurse the babies, and when they are tired of carrying them about in their arms, they strap them on to their back with A cloth.

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

for cooking. The shelf immediately above the fireplace is set apart for smoking fish. The shelves above are filled with firewood, which is thoroughly dried by the smoke and ready for use. As the smoke from the wood fire is not conducted through the roof by any kind of chimney, it spreads itself through the loft, and blackens the beams and rafters of the roof.

This room also serves as a dining-room. When the food is cooked, mats are spread here, and the inmates squat on the floor to eat their meal. There is no furniture, the floor serving the double purpose of table and chairs.

This *bilik* also serves as a bedroom. At night the mats for sleeping on are spread out here, and the mosquito-curtains hung up.

There is no window to let in the air and light, but a portion of the roof is so constructed that it can be raised a foot or two, and kept open by means of a stick.

Round the three sides of this room are ranged the treasured valuables of the Dyaks—old jars, some of which are of great value, and brass gongs, and guns. Their cups and plates are hung up in rows flat against the walls. The flooring is the same as that of the veranda, and is made of split palm or bamboo tied down with cane. The floor is swept after a fashion, the refuse falling through the flooring to the ground underneath. But the room is stuffy, and not such a pleasant place as the open veranda. The pigs and poultry occupy the waste space under the house.

From the *bilik* there is a ladder which leads to an upper room, or loft (*sadau*), where they keep their tools and store their paddy. If the family be a large one, the young unmarried girls sleep in this loft, the boys and young men sleeping outside in the veranda.

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

much time on the war-path, and as the women keep the men up to the mark in this respect, and often will not marry a man who has not been successful in war, they are scarcely to be pitied if extra work fall to their lot during the time the men are away fighting.

The women are earlier risers than the men, and retire to bed earlier. They generally go to the river as soon as they wake, carrying their water-gourds with them. They have a bath, fill their gourds with water, and return to the house to cook the morning meal.

The principal article of food is rice, which is cooked in brass or iron pots. When the rice is ready, it is put out on plates. They eat with their rice either vegetables or fish. Sometimes they have the flesh of wild pig or venison, but that is not usual. A favourite method of cooking is to put the proper quantity of fish or vegetables or meat with sufficient water and a little salt into a newly-cut bamboo. The mouth is then stopped up with leaves, and the bamboo is placed over the fire, resting on a stone at an angle of 45 degrees or more. By the time the bamboo is thoroughly charred the contents are sufficiently cooked, and it is taken from the fire and emptied out into a plate. Sometimes rice is cooked in bamboos, and when it is ready to be eaten, the bamboo is split and torn off in strips, when the rice is found well cooked inside—a stiff mass moulded in the form of the bamboo.

When the food is ready and put out in plates, the men are asked to come into the room and eat. Sometimes the women eat with the men; but if there are too many to eat comfortably at one sitting, the men have their meal first, and the women eat with the children after the men have done.

The Dyaks all sit on the floor, which also serves as

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

264 their table. They have their rice on plates, or sometimes upon clean leaves. They eat with their fingers, dipping the hand when necessary into the common stock of salt, or common dish of meat or vegetables. They eat with their right hand, compressing the rice into portions of convenient size.

262 Nearly every animal is eaten by the Dyaks; fish, venison, and pork are eaten by all, but many tribes eat monkeys, snakes, and even crocodiles.

264 356 231 When breakfast is over, they clean the crockery and put it away. The mats are swept and taken up, and the refuse thrown through the open floor for the pigs and poultry under the house to eat.

622 Each long Dyak village house has its headman, who generally occupies a room in the middle of the house. He is called the *tuai rumah*—"the old man or chief of the house"—and he settles all disputes among the inmates, and decides the amount of the fine the guilty party has to pay. Great deference is paid to him, and as a general rule his people abide by his decisions. But his power is only one of persuasion, and depends upon his personal ability and sense of justice. He cannot in any way coerce his people into obedience. Upon the prestige and conduct of this *tuai rumah* depends the number of families a Dyak house contains. If he be a man of strong personal character, clear-headed, and upright in his dealings, many will settle under him. If he be otherwise, he will quickly lose the families living in his house. They will migrate to other houses where the headman is one they admire and respect.

166 621 There are certain laws among the Dyaks with regard to a family leaving a house. If a new house is to be built, any families of the former inmates may refuse to make

15: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1955 OC6 Iban OC6

PART 1

THE IBAN BILEK-FAMILY.

1. The most salient characteristic of Iban social organization is the practice of long-house domicile. Anyone who has travelled in the interior of Borneo is familiar with the conspicuous shape of a long-house: an attenuated structure supported on innumerable hard-wood posts, it stretches for a hundred yards or more along the terraced bank of a river, its roof—of thatch, or wooden shingles—forming an unbroken expanse. Superficially viewed the Iban long-house has the appearance of being a single structural unit, and many casual observers have made the facile inference that the long-house is therefore the outcome of some sort of communal or group organization and ownership.(1) For the Iban, at least, this inference is the very reverse of true. Among the various families which make up a long-house community there does exist a network of kinship ties, but the Iban long-house is primarily an aggregation of independently owned family apartments. The fact that these apartments are joined one to the other as to produce a long-house detracts little from their essential autonomy. Indeed the unbroken expanse of roof tends to conceal the fact that the Iban long-house is fundamentally a series of discrete entities—the independent family units of a competitive and egalitarian society.

2. A long-house, then, is made up of a series of independently owned family apartments which are joined longitudinally one to the other so as to produce a single attenuated structure. Long-houses do, however, vary very considerably in size: from houses of three or four family apartments and scarcely over a chain in length, to houses that sprawl for more than three hundred yards along the bank of a river and contain upwards of forty different family sections. But before discussing in detail the overall composition of the long-house, let us first turn to a brief examination of the distinct sections or apartments from which every long-house is constructed. Each of these apartments is owned and occupied by a particular family group, and these family groups are the basic corporate units of Iban society. The principal divisions of a family apartment are:

(*a*) the *bilek*, or living room,
(*b*) the *sadau*, or loft,
(*c*) the *ruai*, or roofed gallery,
(*d*) *tanju*, or open platform.

All of these are shown in Fig. 1.

The bilek.

3. Of these four parts the most important is the *bilek*, which is the family living room, and the place where the valued property of the family is stored. Each *bilek* is divided off from the *ruai* by a substantial wall of wooden planks, and side walls separate each *bilek* from the rooms on either side of it. Each *bilek* has one main entrance on to the *ruai*, with a hinged door of wooden slabs that is normally kept closed. At night it is usual for these doors to be barred from the inside. It is also fairly common for the side walls of a *bilek* to be broken by smaller doors or openings, so providing inter-communication between the family apartments of the long-house. But this practice is far from universal; internal doors or openings are only found if the neighbouring families are closely related (e.g. siblings or close cousins), or if they are on particularly friendly terms with one another. On several occasions I witnessed the blocking up of these internal openings following a dispute and quarrelling between neighbouring families. The *bilek* of a long-house always vary slightly in size, and the width of the wall facing on to the *ruai* is some indication of the economic status of the family that owns it. In Rumah Nyala, of the Sungai Sut, the smallest *bilek* was 12ft. 6ins. wide by 16ft. deep, while the largest was 23ft. wide by 17ft. 6ins. deep. The larger *bilek* of Rumah Tungku—a fifty door long-house of the Sungai Tiau—measured 25ft. wide by 24ft. deep.

4. The *bilek* is the normal location for cooking, eating, sleeping and a multitude of domestic tasks. Each *bilek* is equipped with its own cooking place, or *dapur*, which traditionally is situated at the front of the *bilek* against the dividing wall with the *ruai*. It consists of a rough scaffolding of wood which supports a raised hearth of packed clay, and some feet above, a wide rack on which fire wood is stacked ready for use. At this hearth the women boil rice—the staple food of the Iban—and prepare the relishes which accompany it. In the ordinary course of events, all the members of family—men, women, and children—eat together in their *bilek*, squatting in a circle around the meal which has been laid out in the centre of the room. At nights, finely plaited mats are spread, mosquito curtains suspended, and the *bilek* becomes the sleeping place of all but the young unmarried men, who more often favour the open gallery, or *ruai* of the long-house. At the back of the *bilek*, and frequently along both its sides, are stacked the huge jars (*tajau*) and bronze gongs (*tawak*) which constitute the main capital resources of a family, and its chief form of inheritable property. Kept carefully packed away in wooden trunks, or securely wrapped in bark-cloth are the hand-woven fabrics (*pua kumbo* and *kain kebat*), used only on ritual and gala occasions, which are another of the important indications of the wealth and status of an Iban family. Ranged in racks around the walls are plates and bowls, and an extraordinary medley of minor possessions.

The sadau.

5. Above each *bilek*, and jutting out over the *ruai*, is the *sadau*, which is a kind of garret or loft. Here, in immense bark bins, is stored the *padi* grown by the members of the *bilek*. A series of smaller containers hold the carefully selected seed (each family possesses many different types of *padi*), to be used at the next sowing. Most important of all these is the seed of the *padi pun*—

(1) Baring-Gould and Bampfylde, 1909, p. 27.

342 secured, either with key-locks or with wooden bars. It is not uncommon for windows or low doors to be cut into the walls between bilik, to allow traffic or communications, the sharing of food or gossip, between close friends or relatives who live next to one another. But when quarrels arise, these openings are closed off.

The sizes of bilik within a longhouse vary according to the number of members in different families, and the relative wealth. At Rumah Nyala, Aup, the largest bilik is 24 feet wide and 56 feet deep. The smallest bilik resulted from the division of a bilik 20 feet wide into two sections because a husband and wife divorced, yet neither could afford to put up a new bilik. A wall was built, partitioning the bilik into two.

The family cooks, eats, sleeps and stores its property in the bilik. [372] Cooking is done on the family hearth (dapor) made of clay or stone and on which iron bars are suspended. Wood is used for fuel, and fed slowly into [262] a fire below the pots placed on the bars. The staple food is boiled rice and supplemented with ferns, greens, salt-fish or fruits as condiments 512 (lauk, engkayu'). Women do the cooking, often rising at 4 a.m. to prepare 264 the morning meal and, during the farming season, enough rice to be taken by [462] workers to the farm for a noonday meal. The lunch (bekal) is commonly taken in a plastic bag by residents nearer to Sibu, but still wrapped in a betel spathe (upih pinang) where such bags are not common. Workers return about dusk, bringing with them any food-stuffs that they have gathered, and the family shares an evening meal at about 7 p.m.